THE MIND OF CHRIST. IV.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT. HOW JESUS FULFILS LAW

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SERMONS

OF

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

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How Jesus Fulfils Law.*

II.

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."—MATT. v. 17.

EVERY onward movement in religion or society comes to fulfil, and not to destroy. It preserves all that is good in the past, and carries it forward into something better. Destructive reforms are not lasting. The human race is not willing to leave behind or to give up anything it has once attained. It advances, not by jumps, but by growth; and so it has been said that "nature dislikes leaps."

Until we discover the soul of goodness in things evil, we cannot get rid of the evil. This is the riddle which the Sphinx proposes to mankind. The Sphinx is the mystery of evil. It sits by the wayside, meeting us in our daily walks. But in all the evil of the world there is something not evil. Professor Wood has shown to us, in his lectures on Natural History, that those creatures which we regard as noxious have their place and use in the economy of nature. In order to get rid of the evil in man and society, we must discover what good there is in it; and, when we have taken that out and saved it, the evil will disappear.

* A discourse delivered by James Freeman Clarke to the Church of the Disciples, Boston, February 24, 1884.

When Jesus said, "I have not come to destroy the law or the prophets," it must have surprised the people. In many ways he seemed a very radical reformer, and he was so. He went to the roots of things, which is true radicalism. He set aside as of no value much which the people worshipped. The temple was to them an object of devout reverence. It was the centre of all Jewish adoration. But Jesus said, "In this place is one greater than the temple." "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "Ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father." The Sabbath was very sacred. Jesus did what seemed to the Jews to be Sabbath-breaking. The distinction between clean and unclean meats, carefully prescribed in the books of Moses, he abolished in a single sentence: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man." The whole Jewish ritual was destroyed by the teaching of Jesus. He put an end to sacrifices, fastings, the hereditary priesthood, the Jewish claim to be God's peculiar people. He admitted Gentiles, Samaritans, publicans, and sinners to his broad church. He established the great brotherhood of humanity. He took religion out of its Jewish shell and made it universal. That seemed to the Jew a very destructive proceeding.

In what sense, then, was it true that Jesus did not destroy one jot or tittle of the law? In this sense, that he dropped the shell and kept the kernel. He let the body of Judaism fall and kept the soul, and raised it to a higher level. This was what he meant by saying that he came to fulfil the law and the prophets.

To "fulfil," in the sense of Jesus, does not mean merely to fulfil a prediction. Great trouble has been taken to show

that Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets in that sense. Almost everything in the law was supposed to be a type of Jesus, and all the prophets were assumed to have been describing beforehand his coming and character. He fulfilled them, it has been said, by doing and being what they said he would do and be. He was a man of sorrows because Isaiah said he would be a man of sorrows. Prophecy was thus ingeniously adapted to fit itself beforehand to the life of Christ. He fulfilled it, as is thought, by carrying out in his conduct what had been foretold.

This is a mechanical view, and not satisfactory. Prophecy thus used as a proof of Christianity has probably made more infidels than believers. A better view of prophecy regards it as the seed which is fulfilled in the tree. By the law of development all great events come by a gradual process, and the germs are to be seen far back in history. The seed fulfils itself in the stalk, the leaf, the flower, and the fruit. That which was rudimental and imperfect in the law and prophets was unfolded into fruit and flower by the higher teaching of Christ.

Take, for instance, the law of ritual. Jesus fulfilled that in spiritual worship. The earliest form of worship was by sacrifices, which meant giving a present to the gods of a sheep, a lamb, or a bull, to make them favorable. There was a soul of goodness even in that. It implied that the man was willing to give up something valuable for the sake of an unseen good. It did, at least, this: it lifted the soul out of a world of mere sense to an invisible world of spiritual being. It kept alive the thought of something higher than material things.

The Jewish ritual was lifted by Jesus into a higher ritual of prayer and praise, not in one holy place only, but

wherever two or three met in the name and spirit of the Master. Every place becomes holy ground where the love of God lifts the heart to him. All life grows holy, all thought and work and enjoyment turns into worship, when the sense of an infinite, all-surrounding goodness fills the heart. When Jesus taught us to say "Our Father," he fulfilled the early worship of awe and fear in the higher ritual of trust, submission, patience, and hope.

Take again the law of the Sabbath. That among the Jews was one of outward abstinence from work. "In it thou shalt do no manner of work," was its substance. It was a negative duty. But Jesus fulfils it by a positive rest of the soul. The Sabbath rest of Christianity consists in all that refreshes the mind and heart, all which relieves the weary hand of labor. Not only the church with its glad services makes a part of this Christian rest, but also the public gardens and parks, picture galleries and music and libraries, where peaceful and uplifting influences may come to those whose lives on other days are ground down by drudgery. I am quite sure that he who took his disciples to walk in the fields on the Jewish Sabbath would approve of all this, and consider it as fulfilling the law.

The law of righteousness in Judaism was mostly negative. "Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness." Jesus fiulfils these by saying, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Love is positive, active, creative. It does not merely abstain from injury, but also wishes to do good. Law alone must necessarily confine itself mostly to prohibition. It says, "You must not do this, you must not do that." A man may not break one of the ten commandments, nor violate

a single law of the land, and yet he may be hard, tyrannical, false, selfish. The law of the land cannot punish him for these things. But when Jesus said, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," he put into the human soul a seed of goodness which can grow up into perfect generosity. This love fulfils law, carries it out to perfection, enables it to accomplish all good things. Even the law of duty has to be fulfilled by love. The sense of duty, the principle of justice and right, the obligation to do what we ought,— in a word, conscience in man,— is the solid foundation of all goodness. This must stand forever as the basis on which all our life shall rest. This is the seed and germ from which the whole plant must grow. Heaven and earth shall pass away before this great law of right shall pass away. But even this law of duty, this sense of obligation, has its limits, and must be fulfilled by the larger spirit of Christian love.

To illustrate this, let us take the story of the good Samaritan. Let us suppose the man of Samaria to have been actuated, not by human love, but by a sense of duty. In that case, when he saw the wounded traveller, he would probably have said: "This is a Jew. He is not my neighbor. The Jews hate us. If I were in his place, he would do nothing for me. I suppose, however, that I ought to do something for him. I will carry him and seat him in the shadow of that rock; and I will bind up his wounds and pour in oil and wine, and put a vessel of water near him, that he may drink. Having done this, I shall have done my duty. Let some of his own countrymen do the rest. I owe some duties to myself and to my family. I ought not to risk my own life by staying here. I have important work to do elsewhere."

Or suppose that he had taken a somewhat larger view of his duty to the wounded man, and said: "I ought not to leave him here, for he will probably die if he is left alone. I will put him on my beast, and carry him to the nearest house and leave him there. That will be more than my share. That certainly is all that it is my duty to do."

He would have been right in this. No one could ask him as a duty to do more than this. But he did do more. He paid the landlord for the expenses of this stranger, who had no claim upon him at all except that he was a fellow-being. More than that, he was afraid that, when that sum was exhausted, the man might be neglected. Therefore, he took care to let the host know that, on his return, he would remunerate him for any further expenses.

What was the Samaritan's motive in acting thus? Evidently, it was not a mere sense of duty; it was not to satisfy his own conscience. It was something more. It was a real interest in the wounded man. It was the wish to have him saved. He was not thinking of himself or his own duty, but thinking of the man and his needs. This is the difference between the benevolence which comes from a sense of duty and that which comes from a real interest in others. The one is limited, the other unlimited. The one does all it ought, the other all it can.

We must love our work in order to do it well. Without love, all labor is mere drudgery; with it, it becomes art. The best definition of art that I know is "Doing anything as well as it can be done." But we shall never do anything as well as it can be done until we love to do it. The great artists have not worked for money, nor for fame, nor for the praises of the world. They have mostly

passed long years in obscurity, struggling against fortune, rowing hard against the stream. "The world was not their friend, nor the world's law." But their whole soul was in their work. They must do it, no matter what men thought and said about it. Planting themselves on this inward conviction of truth and beauty, the great world came round to them at last.

To be interested in things for their own sake is the secret of all true greatness. Sooner or later this succeeds. Every new reform in its early morning is surrounded by a mist of unpopularity, which makes it look like a portent of evil in men's eyes. But, as the sun rises, the mists are lifted, and it is seen as it really is. Then those who have served it from love, when there was no hope of any speedy triumph, have the satisfaction of seeing its success.

We must have enthusiasm, to do anything well. Common sense is not destroyed, but fulfilled, by enthusiasm. Enthusiasm does not imply the absence of common sense. Enthusiasm does not destroy the reasoning powers. It is not a delusion, a folly, nor an extravagance. It is consistent with the coolest exercise of judgment. It is a fire within the soul, a fire of love, an ardor of conviction. It is being in earnest in what we believe and do; and only earnestness, says the wise man, makes life endurable.

Now, there is nothing which gives so much interest to life as the enthusiasm of Christian faith. It makes the world full of God, full of meaning, purpose, value. It makes all things good, as coming from him. The laws of nature, without God, are relentless, despotic, terrible. They work on coldly, with no regard to the life and happiness of creation. But, when we see something divine

in this vast order, then natural law is transfigured and glorified. So natural laws and physical laws are fulfilled by the love of God. They are filled with meaning, and become always more interesting to us.

In the study of physical facts we follow the apostle's rule: "That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual." We begin with mechanics and ascend to forces. We begin with what can be measured and weighed and counted: we pass on to the immeasurable, vital powers which pervade all things. We begin with single facts and rise to universal laws. We begin with atoms and go on to life. The mystic reverses this law, and begins with God and eternity, and often loses sight of the world and time. The atheist searches for the secret of being in matter itself, hoping, if he can get a sufficiently powerful microscope, to discover life in a germ-cell. It is vain to seek the source of this vast Kosmos by looking downward. The laws of existence reveal themselves more and more as we ascend. Man, who is the highest development of being which we perceive here, is the best type and revelation of the creative power. What is it which makes man the master of the earth? Not his physical forces, nor the keenness of his senses; for in these he is inferior to other creatures. It is his personal power, which includes thought, will, and love. It is that mysterious divine personality in each of us which makes a perfect unit of the soul, bringing into harmony our purpose, our belief, our knowledge, our hope, our affection. This personality in man is the secret of his power. God, therefore, as the highest being, cannot have less personality than man. He cannot have less intelligence than man, or less of

love or less of will, but something corresponding to all these, though so much greater as to be beyond our power of comprehension. But by these powers in ourselves we can commune with him, and find his presence in nature and the soul. The little child who says, "Our Father," looking upward to an infinite love above all outward visible things, has a higher wisdom than the most learned man who looks downward, poring into matter to find there the law of being.

Jesus fulfils natural religion in spiritual religion. The religion of Jesus rests on the manifestations of God in nature; but he adds to this natural faith a higher insight. Natural religion bows in awe before the immensity of being, sees a perfect reason in all things, adores the incomprehensible Infinite, and trusts in an all-controlling wisdom. Jesus destroys nothing of this belief. He leaves awe, adoration, and confidence as a part of Christian worship. He leaves us all the elements of worship we had before. We still sing the psalms which David sang on the Syrian hills. We still accept the highest speculations of Plato and Socrates. All this is incorporated in Christianity. But all this ethnic religion is fulfilled by the sight of love. God loves each of us: he loves every child. He cares for every soul. Even the sinner cannot escape from the love of God. If he mounts up into heaven, it is there; if he makes his bed in hell, it is there, also. God never forgets nor forsakes his children. There is more joy in the presence of God when a sinner repents than there was before. You and I can increase the happiness of the All-blessed One by forsaking our sins. We can please him when we say from our hearts, "My Father." Infinite in all attributes, he is infinite, also, in his tender-

ness, his loving-kindness, his long-suffering. The love which caused Jesus to die for those who hated him is a type of the compassion of the Almighty.

So everywhere love fulfils law. Science has no aim, no end, no meaning, unless fulfilled by a divine love. The law of duty does nothing perfectly until inspired by this high enthusiasm: then it is fulfilled in the beauty of holiness. Religion stands afar off, looking up to heaven, adoring a distant omnipotence, till love brings God so near that we have him in our hearts all the day long. Jesus fulfils philosophy, ethics, science, and religion by this principle, which gives unity and aim to all. He destroys nothing which is true and good in nature, in speculation, and in human life, but fulfils them by the infusion of this subtle, all-pervading element of divine and human love.

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